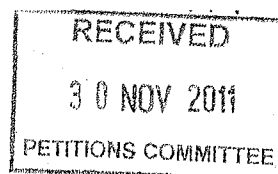




The Hon Kate Ellis MP
Minister for Employment Participation and Child Care
Minister for the Status of Women



The Hon John Murphy MP
Member for Reid
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

29 NOV 2011

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 12 October 2011 concerning a petition recently submitted for the consideration of the Standing Committee on Petitions regarding funding for Take a Break Occasional Care services.

In recognition of the critical importance of affordable, quality early education to Australian families, the Australian Government has undertaken a significant reform agenda to ensure families now have access to more financial assistance with child care, and more choice, than ever before.

The Government has significantly increased funding to early childhood education and care. Overall we will provide \$20 billion over the next four years to give Australian kids the best start in life. This is well more than double the funding provided in the last four years of the former Howard Government.

As part of this investment, the Government is driving a national reform process that will see areas that were previously funded solely by State and Territory Governments receiving significant additional investment from the Commonwealth.

The Australian Government has ceased funding for Neighbourhood Model Occasional Care, which represented an investment of \$1.1 million in Victoria in 2009–2010. Although now forgoing this, the Victorian Government is receiving approximately \$210.6 million for kindergartens over the next five years – an area where the Commonwealth previously had no funding responsibility.

In Victoria alone the Australian Government is also providing record levels of funding for early childhood education and care, including:

- \$399 million through the Child Care Benefit;
- \$291 million through the Child Care Rebate to pay up to 50 per cent of out-of-pocket costs for families;
- \$21.3 million for the Child Care Services Support Program to help new services start or to support services that are struggling, particularly in regional areas;
- \$16.65 million for Children and Family Centres; and

- o \$17.4 million for 11 new Early Learning and Care Centres.

On 25 October 2011 I also announced additional Occasional and In Home Care places for Australian families. The allocation of places represents a rise in support for Australian Government funded Occasional Care places in Victoria of 44 per cent. It is expected that around 250 Occasional Care places will be allocated within Victoria. All existing and prospective Occasional Care providers can apply for the places, including Take a Break services.

In recognition of this significant additional investment, I continue to urge the Victorian Government to maintain funding for the Take a Break program and follow the lead of other states like New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia who have all committed to supporting this type of child care.

I appreciate you bringing the petition to my attention.

Yours sincerely

Kate Ellis